

MARCH 23, 1976

STEINBECK: A LIFE IN LETTERS

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU NOW ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES...FROM THE BOOKSHELF...A SERIES IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY AKOSH CHERNUSH'S REPORT ON A LIFE IN LETTERS BY JOHN STEINBECK, PUBLISHED BY VIKING PRESS. HERE NOW IS YOUR BOOK EDITOR _____.

EDITOR: THE LATE AMERICAN WRITER JOHN STEINBECK NEEDS LITTLE INTRODUCTION. OF HIS SIXTEEN NOVELS, MANY HAVE BEEN TRANSLATED INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND BOOKS LIKE THE GRAPES OF WRATH, EAST OF EDEN, AND OF MICE AND MEN ARE WIDELY KNOWN ABROAD. SIX YEARS BEFORE HIS DEATH IN 1968, JOHN STEINBECK BECAME THE SIXTH AMERICAN AUTHOR TO WIN THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE. NOW VIKING PRESS HAS OFFERED READERS A NEW STEINBECK BOOK -- HIS COLLECTED LETTERS. ELAINE STEINBECK, THE WRITER'S WIDOW, CHOSE, WITH THE HELP OF EXPERTS, SOME 700 LETTERS FROM THE MORE THAN 5,000 SHE OWNED OR BORROWED. THE RESULT IS A BOOK OF MORE THAN 900 PAGES, PUBLISHED UNDER THE TITLE STEINBECK: A LIFE IN LETTERS.

WE LEARN THAT STEINBECK WAS AN INVETERATE LETTER WRITER. IN THE AGE OF THE TELEPHONE, LETTER WRITERS ARE MEMBERS OF AN ENDANGERED SPECIES. BUT STEINBECK DIDN'T LIKE THE TELEPHONE. WE ALSO LEARN THAT HE DISLIKED BEING A CELEBRITY AND, LIKE MANY OTHER WRITERS, FOUND IT

EDITOR: DIFFICULT TO MEET THE PRESSURES THAT COME WITH FAME.
(CONT)

HE WAS 38 YEARS OLD WHEN HE BECAME FAMOUS. IN 1940, STEINBECK, WHO ONCE LIVED ON HIS WIFE'S TWENTY-FIVE-DOLLAR MONTHLY SALARY, PAID FORTY-THOUSAND DOLLARS IN INCOME TAXES.

STEINBECK'S LETTERS TO FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES REVEAL HIM AS UNDERSTANDING OF AND GENEROUS TOWARD HIS LITERARY CONTEMPORARIES. ONLY ONCE DOES HE TALK ABOUT "THE RIDICULOUS PREOCCUPATION OF MY GREAT CONTEMPORARIES, I MEAN FAULKNER AND HEMINGWAY, WITH THEIR OWN IMMORTALITY. IT IS ALMOST AS THOUGH THEY WERE FIGHTING FOR BILLING ON A TOMBSTONE."

THE WRITER ALSO COULD TAKE CRITICISM. WHEN HIS PLAY, BURNING BRIGHT, WAS ATTACKED BY THEATER CRITICS IN 1950, HE REMARKED SIMPLY: "THEY WERE NOT AT FAULT. IT WAS NOT A GOOD PLAY." HIS LETTERS ALSO SHOW THAT STEINBECK COULD ADAPT TO LIVING ALMOST ANYWHERE -- IN HIS NATIVE SALINAS VALLEY IN CALIFORNIA, IN LONG ISLAND, IN LONDON OR ROME. BUT WHEREVER HE LIVED, HE ALWAYS BECAME INVOLVED IN THE LIFE AROUND HIM. HE COMPLAINED ABOUT HIS NEIGHBORS AND HE WROTE WITH GREAT ENTHUSIASM ABOUT HIS DOGS.

WE LEARN ABOUT HIS WORK AS A WAR CORRESPONDENT DURING WORLD WAR TWO AND ABOUT THE TRIP HE MADE TO THE SOVIET UNION IN 1947 WITH THE FAMOUS PHOTOGRAPHER ROBERT CAPA. WE ALSO LEARN WHY, UNLIKE MANY OTHER AMERICAN WRITERS, STEINBECK SUPPORTED THE AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE INDOCHINA WAR. STEINBECK'S SON FOUGHT IN VIETNAM AND

EDITOR: STEINBECK HIMSELF WAS STERNLY ANTI-COMMUNIST.
(CONT)

STEINBECK WAS AN UNOFFICIAL ADVISER TO PRESIDENTS,
EXCHANGING IDEAS WITH FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, JOHN F.
KENNEDY AND LYNDON JOHNSON. IN 1952 AND AGAIN IN 1956,
HE CAMPAIGNED FOR ADLAI STEVENSON IN HIS LOSING RACE FOR
THE PRESIDENCY. IN A 1962 LETTER, HE JOKINGLY ASKED
STEVENSON TO WRITE AND DELIVER HIS NOBEL PRIZE ACCEPTANCE
SPEECH FOR HIM.

THE STEINBECK WHO EMERGES FROM THESE 700 LETTERS IS A
MAN WHO BELIEVED IN JUSTICE, DECENCY AND IN THE
PERFECTABILITY OF MAN.

ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO THE WEEKLY VOICE OF AMERICA
SERIES, FROM THE BOOKSHELF, WHICH REPORTS ON BOOKS
AMERICANS ARE CURRENTLY READING. TODAY'S SELECTION
WAS A LIFE IN LETTERS BY H JOHN STEINBECK. JOIN US
NEXT WEEK _____ (AT THIS TIME) FOR ANOTHER SELECTION
FROM THE BOOKSHELF. THIS IS _____.

##

##

##

WJL/PY